

ind  
ex  
june 1996

inside :  
*nifty fiction*

by **chris bell**

poetry by  
**tanya  
evanson**

What's up  
in T.O.  
Julie  
Crysler?

ARCMTL  
index magazine **MONTREAL**

literature/performance listings

**index** is published on the first of every month except August and January by index magazine. 2,000 copies are distributed around Montréal's downtown area. **index** costs \$1 to make. It is free in Montréal; subscriptions by mail are available for \$18 a year. **Thanks** to those who made donations. ISSN 1195-9290 © All material copyright 1996 for the authors.

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**index magazine**

4068 St. Laurent

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## The Emperor's New Fonts

*"The visual-verbal (ie. bilingual) "speaker" can exploit the capacity of each language to signify, shifting between the two as necessary"*

-Anne Burdick, *Emigre* #36

*"Don't try to use cool fonts if you don't know what you're doing"*

-a helpful *index* reader

More than anything, I'd love to be fluent in both languages, writing and design. But my accent always gives me away. Somedays, I just can't find the right font to express my meaning.

Ideally, magazines are a happy collaboration between the writer, the designer and the reader. Never has the designer's role been so foregrounded as now, with the trickling down of publication technologies. To the lexicon of the pop star, the 90's have so far added three figures: the club dj, the performance poet, and the graphic designer.

David Carson, the Kurt Cobain of the New Typography, began his star turn at *Ray Gun*, fucking up their layout in a way that was fascinating and/or frustrating. The magazine's sales soared, Carson split and starting showing his work in museums and accepting corporate advertising jobs. In an interview in the February/March issue of *Might* magazine, the issue is polarized for us nicely. *Might* accuses the designer of sacrificing content for style in order to appeal to "teenagers who want to appear hip": "more often than not, people simply don't (or simply can't) read the words on your pages. What you have designed is a magazine that could not possibly fulfill its intended purpose: to disseminate new ideas and information." Carson responds by advising *Might* to lose their "early-80's visual orientation" if they want to be read, and emphasizing the designer's interpretive role: "It's a horrible disservice to writers and readers to present information in a boring manner."

Copping Carson's pose in *index* seems unlikely and unsafe - if he was working in Montreal's anglo literary scene he'd have probably been lynched by a mob of angry writers by now. And obviously questions of form and content do not have to be boiled down to an either/or, Pepsi vs. Coke debate. What has become clear to me since I starting thinking about design seriously (ie. since *index* lost its regular production staff) is that the production of meaning does not begin and end with the writer, the writing. Once you admit that, design becomes content.

Tracy Bohan

ARCMTwe **index** are







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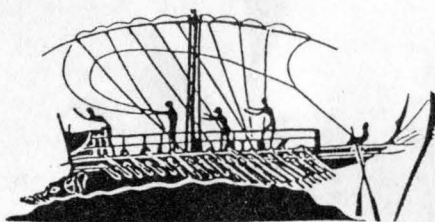
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## Playwrights' Workshop Montreal

*"There is a vitality, a life force, an energy,  
a quickening that is translated through you into  
action and because there is only one of you in all  
time this expression is unique and if you block it,  
it will never exist though any other medium and  
be lost, the world will not have it."*

Martha Graham

tel:843.3685 fax:843.9384

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*Footnotes* ①

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BOUGHT DAILY SOLD

# NOTELL REEPPAS GAS

He had walked the plank too early, with too much lead and not enough direction, and collapsed on the sofa drowning in phrases. Memories clipped themselves loose as outlines, held still by pins on which hung streamers of words. The television played soundlessly, each 3 second shot a condensation of ten minutes on set, a day of rehearsal, a week of writing. He wondered what the actors had to forget to get into character, what actions and history and friends and relations? He lay on the huge sofa like an invalid, pillowed and propped. Jackie had called the sofa the Queen Anne, after an ocean liner he supposed, though he had never quite asked - he just laughed like he got it. His sister, who had given him the sofa, always called it: 'Oh, God, you've still got that...'. He called it the Elvis Couch, because the cushions were re-covered in shiny red rayon and the body in black. The material had come from the set of a vampire tango cabaret he produced. His mother had sewn it right over the old casings herself. He had watched. John had danced the tango. Back off of it, he thought, back off of it, nothing there. Jackie came home one morning, her eyes wide and white, outlined by sharp, sudden black circles of fear. He was in the kitchen, and stopped making coffee when she appeared. He never said a word. She had met two guys, a middle aged man and some-one younger, maybe even his son. The three of them closed the bar, drinking beer and doing the men's coke. 'Fuck,' she said. 'Fuck.' They were still high and so went back to their hotel room, why not? Somewhere in the course of it the middle-aged man crawled on top of her. The boy was watching tv. 'No,' she said. 'No.' There wasn't any real fight, just half-made gestures that proved far too complicated for the old man to follow. He rolled off; he'd just as soon sleep. Jackie slipped off the bed and into a chair as far away from them both as she could get. The boy was still awake. The boy was still watching tv. She talked to him a bit, in between long whiles of wait. He would sleep soon, he would sleep, before the other woke up.



**CHRIS BELL**

"I'd never do it," the man said, "but if the plot is resold and we move them to another grave, some guys take the teeth, you know for the gold. Or rings or if there's anything...but I'd never do it."

Without doubt that was his best first line. Hemingway: start with a true sentence, something you actually heard or which actually happened.

I'm tired, tired of me and want a story to get that perfect order, that perfect closure in an embrace that remains, seductive, suspending me after I walk the plank

The man smiled, the points of his mouth turning up to worm into his pasty black moustache. He laughed, I think, to reassure me. Actually I have no idea why he laughed. Dressed in blue government overalls, he sat on a throne of beer cases set against the storage room's side wall. Two older men were perched on either side of him like overalled ministers, turned more towards him than me. They smiled and watched it all unfold. How often? We were standing, Masha at my right, facing the coke head who faced her, and blocked the door. Masha hardly spoke the whole time. There wasn't any real conversation, anyway, just voices patching up tense, open space.

Masha - a woman with this name would be kind of plain, blond and certainly not svelte, but would have an interesting life history. Names were tricky. Garp, Irving's main character, read phone books for their names. He had seen the movie Garp but not Hotel New Hampshire, except for the tv clips with Natasja Kinski, whom he had only seen in Polanski's Tess, after which he read Hardy. Lately, Natasja Kinski was doing hair color commercials. At first he thought she was Nadia Commanich, whose name was coolest because of the Commanich. He never remembered the shows, though. Masha, maybe that's too plain; how about Trish, no, too ditz; Trisha, with a pause, a deep breath and extra thought...that'll do. Masha, anyway, even while considering the word's resonances, he had to really try just not to think the term: 'peasant'. Maybe he could use that bit, though, slip it in as some kind of confessional.

**Break open the moment and let the story pour out** and coagulate, bind, make into meaning I want to use words my grand-parents did, like sweetheart and dearest and golly gee whillickers I miss the word: 'wrought', as in the way my body wrings life from some other organism Everyday, everyday No animal action will ever drown out the drone, no human illusion will dazzle me free Bring me back but not along any path just bring me back through to miles and miles and miles of home and let me sleep, let me go

The coke head kept staring at Trisha, beautiful Trisha, even though I did all the talking. Keep talking, keep talking, I thought, distract him completely and maybe he'll stop. But he wanted her. His eyes stayed locked on hers even when he glanced over to answer me, being polite, I suppose, by following rules of conversation. Trisha stared back, watching his moves but not him. Her fingers fumbled nervously at each other as if to build or to find or to use. She laughed the way you do when your mind is totally blank, shorted out by a hundred normal actions with no possible sane way of playing any one of them out. We had come here, why had we come here?

# while i sit on my female unit: burroughs style

i am dependent  
i am dependent  
i am dependent  
depression, like old age, asks: why the fuck was i put into this human form  
anyway?  
when i could name so many other armours that would suit me more:  
a tree, a jock strap, a grain of pollen  
i should have been an egg of a different sort  
chicken, unfertilized  
scrambled or cooked w / my sun facing the sky  
eggshellfull of calciumhome  
good for bones and bleeding and acidity of the stomach  
death by hot-metal-wall, mouth and, of course, toilet

i remember a story from my youth, sit back, let me tell it:  
it was the time when i opened an egg  
and the morningurine yolk burst forth  
into the dark silver bowl  
but something wasn't right  
i noticed a red spot on the sun  
it begged me come closer  
i lowered my Grave's bulging eye onto the red heart beat  
(a cell-life beginning  
why do you feel so goddamn good  
about stopping a heartbeat and eating the flesh around it?  
while your houseanimals lick at the very heart of the matter  
right under your alcoholic noses  
we're all humans here, except for the angels and haters  
we can eat each other if need be  
we even have names for such practices:  
cunnilingus, fellatio, massage, conversation  
today i hate everyone  
so close your bellies and put your cockguns down  
and let me die in peace

ARCMT  
tanya evanson



She knelt on the floor, stitching, and I thought of things Russian, thought of Baba Yaga the old woman who ate little children in a house balanced on chicken bone stilts. What I remember forever is her lips pursed and holding the pins as she sewed, an image she had of her mother and hers, forever and ever.

The beer store belonged to the coke head. Earlier, before the government junkies had shown up, the three of us had come in through the front door, which he immediately locked behind us, and walked through the unlit aisles of perfectly ordered, full shelves, to this windowless storage room. For hours the coke head had been talking proudly about his business, this beer store, as if we were family he was trying to impress, or somehow convince. The store seemed pristinely legitimate: it had goods and a cash register and everything, except maybe lights. He just hadn't had that perfect day to open. It just never quite happened. This poor empty bastard just stood there wanting Trisha. He had kidnapped us from a bar, at closing, for just one drink in a teacup at a restaurant he knew. At dawn, fresh as ever, he wanted to get ready for work so we went back to his place, first, before letting him take us home. He had a car, and we would have felt weird walking in the sunlight, full of coke and smarmy with twelve hour old beer sweat. His apartment was spotless, his furniture all new, laid out through the rooms for some absent family. It was a place where he never lived, but only stopped at on his way to a place in which he never worked. There was a bucket of silver in the kitchen, big rocks of it that looked like meteorites. They came from someone in a hospital, who took them from a machine that salvaged silver from the chemicals that processed x-rays. The coke head wanted to give some to Trisha. At first she said no, but then she accepted, just because it was offered. I sat there, insisting. His gesture was bizarrely romantic. It passed innocently because we were all so stoned, and didn't dare peel even one thin layer off with a joke. The coke head opened the freezer of his kitchen refrigerator and took out a handful of bags, each the size of an ounce of weed that in high school we would divvy up for the weekend. He picked one out, handling it like a limp, severed dick, and lay the rest back, somewhere deep in the cold. 'Shit,' I thought. I ran through the past evening as he cut up the coke, double-checking everything I told him about my name and Trisha's, where we lived, what we did, who we were. Outside, through the sunlit window of the kitchen door, I could hear kids playing in the neighbour's yard. The door was secured by a simple latch. There weren't even any curtains on its window, just a gauze that let us see out, but no-one see in. How many people had he brought here?

He had said to some art writers, the creative students elite, that you can't be a prostitute if nobody's buying. And buddy, every time he hit a key, every time he so much as walked toward that fucking thing, he was making the decision that he was for sale. He remembered his mother once telling him a long, didactic bit of family history, and then a few weeks later seeing the exact scene played out by Gregory Peck on the midnight movie. Maybe she thought he was too young to stay up that late. He wondered how much more he could scoop out of his brain to fill that one-thousand-two-hundred-and-fifty word cone.

What if I can't do it

And I wanted the silver and I wanted the coke, but all I could think was: 'You stupid fuck. We don't know you. You're going to get me killed.' But I sat there, looking at him, waiting to be served, and I kept my mouth shut.

Clarity can be had only through perfect honesty or the absolute rigour of a lie.

What if I can't be honest. What if I'm scared. What if I don't like me

We were there for him to fuck her.

We were there for him to fuck her.

We were there for him to fuck her.

How much of this is about me, anyway? Stories are all entertainment until someone gets raped or they die. Then the

End



## June 12

9 pm

earthshack temporal coffee houses presents **beetfieldpeon** with special guests including folksinger **Herschel Fromme**. At the old Phoenix space, 3901 St. Laurent which is now Café le Comédien. Admission is two canbucks. 989-2381.

## June 15

8:30 pm

Food not Bombs Benefit at Le Café du Mannekenlys, 2008 Amherst (between Sherbrooke and Ontario). Featuring **Conrad Sichler** and **Ummni Khan**. Call Conrad at 937-9186.

## June 18

9 pm

Playwright's Workshop Montreal presents the **Beggar's Opera** every second Tuesday at the Strathern Center, 3680 Jeanne Mance #310. It is free and open to everyone so come bring your plays for review. Tonight **Vadnee S. Haynes**. Call **Rebecca Scott** @ 843-3685.

## June 19

9 pm

earthshack temporal coffee houses presents **beetfieldpeon** with special guests including folksinger **Herschel Fromme**. At the old Phoenix space, 3901 St. Laurent which is now Café le Comédien. Admission is two canbucks. 989-2381.

## June 20

7 pm

It's shameful how we have missed this one for so long. The **Ethnic Origins Book Store**, 2725 Notre Dame W. has been putting on a night of poetry every third Thursday of the month featuring notable poets in the black community or the occasional theme night. It is an open mic, but phone ahead if you want to perform. A well of untapped talent.

Get there early. Call 938-1188 for info.

## June 20

8:30 pm

Enough Said presents the launch of **Bootlegging Apples** by **Mary Elizabeth Grace**, an **Insomniac Press** title with cd. Also featuring **Jai**, and **Jill Battson**. At **Bistro 4**. Call **Lee** for info @ 278-5939.

## June 26

9 pm

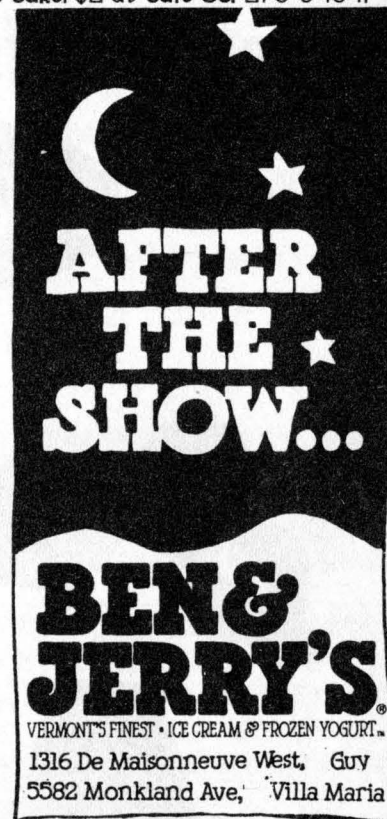
earthshack temporal coffee houses presents **beetfieldpeon** with special guests including folksinger **Herschel Fromme**. At the old Phoenix space, 3901 St. Laurent which is now Café le Comédien. Admission is two canbucks. 989-2381.

## June 28

9 pm

index presents, in collaboration with **The Swamp** and **conundrum press**, the book/tape launch of **Everything** !

**Know About Love I Learned From Taxidermy** by **Catherine Kidd**. Come see her arms flail. Also featuring: **Corey Frost**, **Martha Wainwright**, and **Rob Lutes**. Your host is **Jake**. \$2 at **Café So**. 276-8494.



## In Other Words

### June 15-23

Noon-midnight

We live in a city on the fringe, walking with an umbrella on a tightrope suspended politically and artistically. A city of artists paying cheap rent. **The Fringe Festival** is back and is an opportunity for us fringe dwellers to communicate some of that weirdness inside. The Fringe Festival is basically anything anyone wants to do on stage. There will be very little spoken word this year but lots o' good theatre, dance, and music. All tickets are under \$8. The events will take place at five indoor venues: **P Scene**, 3449 Aylmer Alley; **Strathern Center**, 3680 Jeanne Mance; **Players Theatre**, 3480 Mactavish; **The Mirror Cabaret**, 3480 Mactavish; and **Movieland**, 3425 University; as well as an outdoor site on Mactavish near McGill. The events are too numerous and eclectic to be listed here but pick up a program. For more information call: **849-FEST**.



**Word is**

## June 28

9 pm

**Catherine Kidd** is regarded by many in the Montreal community as the next best thing. Her performances, whether in a bathtub painted like a cow, or with a bloody smock and a stuffed rabbit, always leave the crowd breathless. These powerful performances have been captured on cassette by **The Swamp** and in a book by **conundrum press**. Catch her now before she moves on to National acclaim or to a little hut on the Danish Baltic Sea.

## Everything I Know About Love I Learned From Taxidermy

will be launched at **Café So** tonight and will be

sponsored by *index*. It will cost \$2 to get in but this can go toward the book/tape (\$5) because you'll want to buy it (of course).

Also featured will be the return of ga. That's right, **Corey Frost** will be back from Japan and doing new stuff. Also music by **Rob Lutes** and the inimitable **Martha Wainwright**. If all this ain't enough, your host for the evening will be the always unpredictable **Jake**.

If you're tired of the open mic crowd then here's a chance to see polished, quality performance which you can take home at the end of the night. Call 276-8494 for more details.

## Listings open

## June 1

8  $\mu\text{m}$ 

**Komikaze!** *Montreal's Alternative Comic Art Weekend* presents a **Comic Jam** at Stornaway, 1407 St. Alexandre with minicomic launches including Rick Trembles' Goopy Spasms slide show. Plus live music with **Sofa, Sully, Lucky, Venus Cures All**, and **ACME music service**. All Ages, \$5. Bring your pens.

June 1

2  $\mu\text{m}$ 

**Komikaze!** Continues at Café Chaos, 1637 St. Denis. Live comic art session, Mural, solo improv and collective improv.

June 1

3  $\mu\text{m}$ 

ARCMTL 3 pm  
Komikaze! Exhibition at Salaberry Hall.

1710 Beaudry with a free show beginning at 8 pm with **Platon et les caves** and **Les Tchigaboux**. The exhibition continues the next day at 3 pm.

## June 4

7  $\mu\text{m}$ 

Playwright's Workshop Montreal presents the **Beggar's Opera** every second Tuesday at the Strathern Center, 3680 Jeanne Mance #310. It is free and open to everyone so come bring your plays for review. Tonight *In the Darks* and *Dreams of the Palace* by **Coralie Duchesne**. Call Rebecca Scott @ 843-3685.

## June 5

9 pm

earthshack temporal coffee houses  
presents **beetfieldpeon** with special  
guests including folksinger **Herschel  
Fromme**. At the old Phoenix space,

3901 St. Laurent which is now Café le  
Comédien. Admission is two canbucks.  
989-2381.

**June 8**

2-4 pm

Double Hook presents **Gordon Lunan**  
signing copies of *"The Making of a Spy:  
a Political Odyssey"*, 932-5093.

## June 9

2-4 pm

L'Androgyne presents **Jean-Paul Daoust** who will be signing his latest book of poetry, *"111 Wooster Street"*. Call 842-4765.

June 11

7 pm

Double Hook presents Marilyn  
Simmonds reading from "The Conflict  
Lover: a True Story". 932-5093.

It's not surprising that the academics got a little annoyed and started taking potshots at spoken word. As media interest has calmed, however, the conflict between the page poets and the performers seems to have subsided.

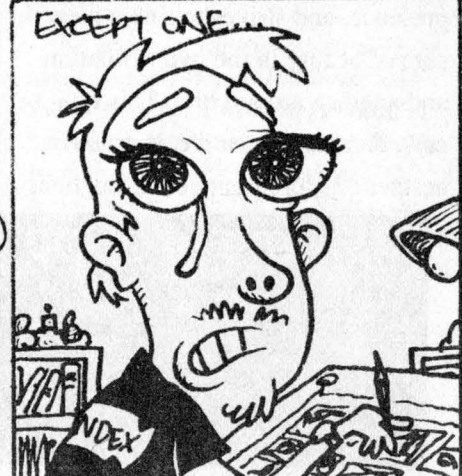
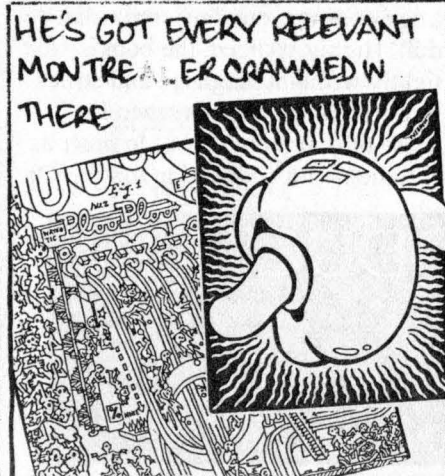
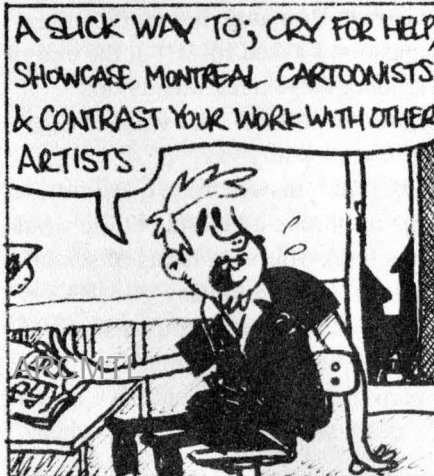
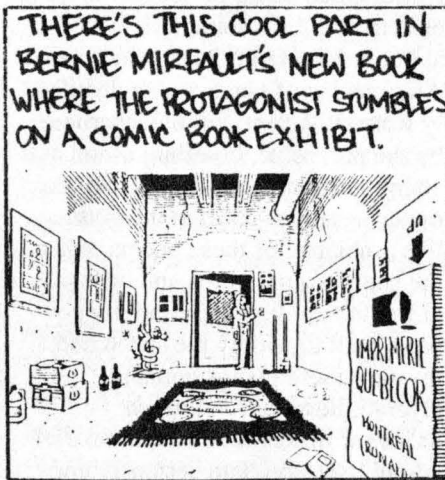
"It's becoming a dead issue, thankfully," said Holmes. "A lot of performance poets are realizing that performance poetry as a phenomenon is dying. The good ones are realizing that they're also writers."

It is a dead issue. As a sexy media event, spoken word has expired in Toronto. In practice, it still exists. Toronto's literary community is buzzing with activity. On almost any night of the

week, there is at least one launch, reading, workshop, or open stage listed in the local literary calendar, *The Word*. They're quite well attended. Big stars like John Giorno and Lydia Lunch that don't make it to Montreal play large halls in Toronto.

Montreal has an advantage, however. While the Toronto media took the "spoken word phenomenon" in one big bite and spat it out again, Montreal's has chewed more slowly and consistently. We're also lucky that despite the wide variety of writing and performance styles, the Montreal scene has not become polarized in the way that it has in Toronto.

# review

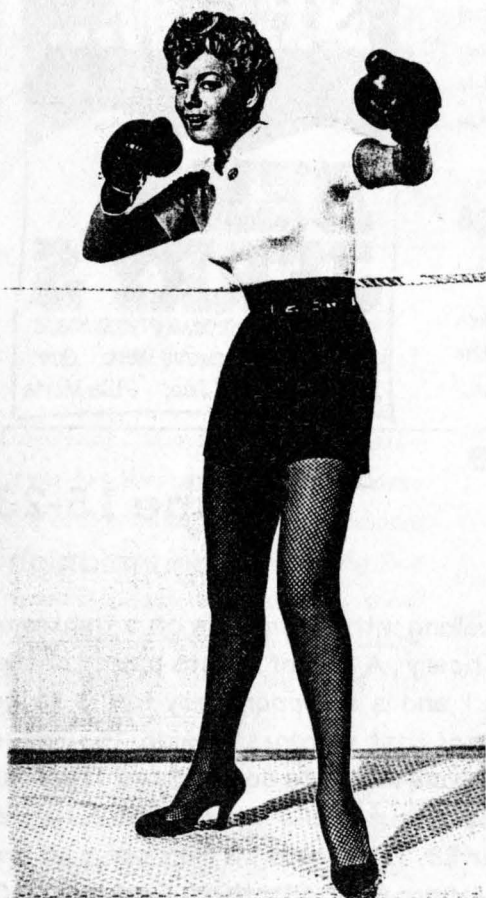




# Round 10, 001: Literary Fisticuffs

Holmes vs.  
Battson

with  
your host  
**Julie Cryslér**



Last fall, a nasty little controversy came to a head in Toronto's literary community. Michael Holmes, scholar, poet, and editor of the *Insomniac* anthology of Canadian poetry, *The Last Word*, wrote an article published in *This* magazine which denounced spoken word as nothing more than "the flavour of the month."

Holmes' article sent shock waves through the community. Many spoken word artists and fans jumped into the ring, calling Holmes, among other things, a pompous academic. Other academics came to his defense, and soon spoken word uberorganizer, Jill Battson was forced into an argument about whether or not "spoken word" or "performance poetry" was poetry at all.

According to Battson, it was not so much a conflict between "page" and "stage" poets, as academics versus non-academics.

"These academics can feel their monopoly slipping," she said over lunch at an overpriced Queen Street bistro. "No one will listen to them any more."

Holmes' largest complaint about spoken word, or "performance poetry," as it is now called in T.O., is the lack of substance.

"I think that often the pyrotechnics of performance obscure the fact that there's nothing there," Holmes said. "I think the pyrotechnics often obscure the good writing as well."

"When someone gets up before you at a reading and they're leaping around like a maniac, it skews the way the audience is going to respond to you," he said.

In 1994, Lollapalooza included a poetry stage, and for about a year afterward, the media latched onto spoken word as the latest hip thing. Bob Holman was profiled in the *New Yorker*; poets had their pictures in *Rolling Stone*; BMG signed Maggie Estep; there were poets doing their thing on MuchMusic and MTV. For young spoken word types, it was an exciting time — poetry might really make it big, it might become truly important to the mass culture. It seemed as though content was actually making a comeback.

The media blitz hit Toronto as hard as anywhere; spoken word artists and performance poets got a lot of ink and airtime. Toronto has spawned a number of large-scale X-generation-style literary projects: Battson's *Word Up*, (the video series on MuchMusic, the CD, and the anthology), *Insomniac Press'* slick paperback collections by performance poets, etc.

cies on offer here. Raven Kaldera, for example, is "a pansexual androgynous leather top and priestess of the Dark Goddess who teaches ritual S/M, safe topping technique, and third gender mysteries." "Predator," Raven's accomplished contribution, combines S/M with the longstanding conventional theme of vampirism as disease.

While I'll be the first to admit that one person's erotica is another person's turn-off, there's sure to be something here for everyone. *Blood Kiss* has gender-shifting vampires, straight/gay/lesbian vampires, vampires into S/M, shaving-fetish vampires, infected vampires, and virgin vampires, among others. (I feel like I'm doing a Stephen and David Schiller commercial). In short, these vampires swing a helluva lot of ways, and *what more can reader want?*

My particular favourite is Renée M. Charles's lesbian shaving fetish tale "Cinnamon Roses," a rare story in this collection as it is both very well written and a literally breath-taking piece of erotica. This brings me to what is perhaps the only real problem in this volume. While some stories are well written and even compelling reading, others lose sight of the erotica. Two stories in particular, Gary Bowen's "The Brass Ring" and Amelia G's "Wanting," virtually lose sight of the vampire. The other tale I'd isolate for negative comment is Warren Lapine's "The Hunger," which is a piece of vampire erotica in search of a plot and some erotica.

The other four stories are actually quite luscious, however. Taking the Eros-Thanatos connection to the extreme, Dave Smed's "Loved to Death" offers an enticing erotic tale about a female vampire serial killer who literally fucks men to death. Finally, local writer Pat Salah's story

"The Perfect Form" is set in a club called Pandemonium in Montreal, "the Canadian New Orleans." Recounting the establishment of a type of vampire harem as seen through the eyes of a recent horrified initiate, Salah's work seems to be extracted from a larger work (if not, it certainly has potential as a linger work).

In short, *Blood Kiss* is an uneven collection. As to the subtitle of Vampire Erotica, that is not offered here in the strictest sense. Although the vampire has always been a highly erotically-charged creature, it didn't engage in actual human-style sex until the work of Anne Rice. For those who might be interested, however, the eroticising of actual blood-sucking is occasionally incorporated into the sexual scenes recounted here.

Carol M. Davison



*Perhaps?*

Issue #3, Spring 1996

\$5

*Perhaps?* is an attractively desk-top



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published production scattered with moody drawings and photographs, held together with a very ugly blue binding. Its Editorial introduces us to a man who got bored with writing, mentions Montreal's Plateau "circular literary community" and seems to promise that, perhaps, this magazine will "change the way you see the world" as "words mean things." Throughout the body of the journal, there are poems and stories of surprising competence and well-made beauty, but honestly, nothing quite able to justify the tentative eschatology of the editor. Instead of rescuing the word and literature from boredom and giving us a whole new world to play in, *Perhaps?* cautiously steps out into Eden, then seeing it might rain goes in again to have some tea.

The prose is, for me, marred by an assured good-humoured irony that fairly glistens. The writers here don't believe in words, they simply like to look that way. Richard Barnes' *The New Tenant* is Kafka on Prozac, a go-nowhere "isn't niceness cute and life strange" story that's still loads of fun to read. Gilbert Salvador's *Far Harder* starts in mid-action as a Sheriff gets sucked into a sinkhole in a swamp and goes from there, its lush, rotten language a perfect



**American Standard****Todd Swift****Vox Hunt Press, 1996**

*American Standard* is a 40-page verse melodrama that harks back to the good old days of poetic self-indulgence and dark Romantic lyricism. The reader is forewarned from the outset. For those with any doubt as to what the book is about, the author offers this announcement in the preface: the poems are "mainly written to lovers and God, and the absence of these" -- this will be a self-conscious journey into the "standard" material that has been fertile ground for poets since the days of clay tablets.

Set in the not-too-far-off country of *noir*, *American Standard* revives the muse-stricken Poet-Hero who struggles to locate a sense of redemption in a world where "loss is known to all, but fails to remind us of anything in particular." Here, the cities are inhabited by soulless, featureless creatures who have become stranded or lost on their way to elsewhere some, and exist in states perpetual fear and paranoia. The lighting is high-contrast black and white; there are plenty of sharp edges, shadows and smoke. The mood is somber and foreboding. There are ghosts, aliens and missing persons. Somewhere close by, there's a war going on . . .

The narrator relishes in unabashed Romanticism. Simultaneously, he mourns the loss of earthly or divine presence, and strives to find a measure of beauty in the overt isolation and anguish around him. This typically Romantic creative/destructive aesthetic is foregrounded throughout

the book. In "13 Reasons For Not Looking At A Blackbird," for example, the poem's own creation is undercut by questioning the possibility of creation in a world where even the concept of loss has lost its meaning. As the last two lines assert, "there are no poems worth writing. Beauty has flown from our land, a black bird." Similarly, in the opening poem, "What To Do With Lightening," the narrator comes to the conclusion that although a poet's solitary "conversations with the elements are cruel," they are necessary in locating a certain "honesty that prevails." Sounds like high-pressure work.

In a number of poems, this almost confessional sense of honesty is quite effective; there's something brave about indulging in the ego so openly. Aficionados of verse with a decidedly Romantic slant will be absorbed by the pervasive, brooding mood and attention to image -- there are many opportunities to revel in the gothic-like ambiance of these poems. Also, the sudden quick turns and occasional freefalls of language and images work well to supply the speed and mystery these poems demand. Overall, however, *American Standard* makes the fatal mistake of taking itself too darn seriously and often ends up sounding somewhat dull. Highly stylized, the book is tightly wrought language and structural formality contributes to its sense of drama, but tends to push its flirtation with convention too far. Or

maybe not far enough. As a result, the poems seem to get stuck in an archaic blend of highly emotive, Poetic language and slightly pompous Romantic cultural heroism. This is definitely an I-talk-you-listen publication. Although the experiment of a book of "standards" is an interesting one, humourlessness, rigidity and general lack of innovation makes *American Standard* fall somewhat short.

Lance Romance

**Blood Kiss: Vampire Erotica****Edited by Celia Tan****Boston: Circlet Press, 1994****\$9.95**

Among other things, 1994 was a good year for vampire erotica. On the heels of Poppy Z. Brite's provocative collection, *Love in Vein*, there appeared *Blood Kiss*, seven tales edited by Celia Tan.

As her prefacing note attests, Tan clearly recognized and tapped into the vampire's erotic potential. "The vampire is a perfect subject for erotic fantasy," she writes, and although Tan's claim appears obvious -- the Eros-Thanatos combination at this creature's symbolic core has been well exploited since his entrance into German Romantic literature -- the question I asked myself at the end of reading these tales was: is this Vampire erotica? And what is vampire erotica anyway?

Before I answer these questions, let me backtrack a bit and outline what this book offers. In terms of sexual orientation and fantasy, *Blood Kiss* presents a veritable smorgasbord of erotic vampire "positions." A brief perusal of the Contributor's List provides a sense of the literary delicacy

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## Magazines I Wish I Could Afford

Nothing ignites my consumer lust faster than a rack full of magazines. Glossy perfumey ones, weighty intellectual ones, cut&paste photocopies, arty & obscure, trashy & sick, foreign, local . . . I adore them all. More distressingly, I want to own them all.

The magazine fetishist is not content to browse endlessly or borrow from friends; she wants to take the objects of her desire home and pile them up in the bathroom, say, or beside her bed. Alas, means and desires rarely meet, so I hit the well-worn trail from my apartment to my favourite magazine stand. While the crowds next door are yawping it up, I am content here, surrounded by the soft sound of rustling paper.

A cultural note: along with smokers and manic-panic addicts, Montreal is also a haven for magazine browsers. Rarely have I seen one of those surly "This is NOT a library!"-type warnings that one encounters in so many other less civilized cities. Still, at some point, I feel a moral imperative to either buy something or get out. Better yet, I bring my friend Mike, and experience a vicarious thrill from his purchases.

Which brings me to his copies of *Frieze* maga-

zine, a bi-monthly British/American contemporary art and culture journal. *Frieze* is a high-quality mag that doesn't ignore "low" culture. The paper is thick, the colour graphics are lush, and the design is simple but clever. Best of all, great writers like Jon Savage address everything from punk aesthetics to ice hockey to OJ Simpson to contemporary art to critical theory.

The latest issue includes an article on visual prose and a feature by Simon Reynolds on militaristic imagery in popular culture, particularly hip hop and jungle, and video games. Reynolds takes the implications of youth cultures seriously, without coming off like a poseur or a patronizing intellectual. Indeed, *Frieze*'s strength is its ability to fuse pop culture and critical theory without being obscure or feeling the need to dumb things down due to the subject matter.

The meaty review section offers choice selections from international gallery shows and publications. The reviewers are uniformly thorough and intelligent; reading their coverage is the next best thing to being the jet-set contemporary art aficionado you always wanted to be.

T. Bohan

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metaphor for post-lapsarian fiction. Todd Babian's *Compassion And Its Cadeau* is as narcissistic as its narrator, who confesses that if his story was set in the summer he'd be "looking good, because that's what summer does to a guy." These are writers who like themselves and feel no post-modern crisis. After all, they write well, why not sit back and enjoy a cold one?

The poetry is more earnest, under pressure, as poets have less to feel confident about generally. Rose Merrill's poems about her father are fine and terse with sharp resignation. Coral Hull lets us hear the antipodal voice of Australia in its rich, faintly queer tongue. This Penguin poet uses an interesting extended flat line in *A Night Away From Home* to yoke the exotic and rustic together elegantly. Jocko's (is it wrong for me to want a good poet to use a better nom de plume?) take on Wallace Stevens is only vaguely predictable, and quite fresh and witty up until the end third, where he gets carried away; his other poems about bookshelves seems boyishly torn between ingenuity and a genuine love of books. Sylvie Bourassa Burman is lyrical and always writes good poems; Kerri Embrey's themes are obvious, but the execution is sure and her style developing nicely. The real find here is Catherine Manansala, whose *Montreal 1994* captures the mood and spirit of our times perfectly with lines like "No one speaks the same language here./ I don't even understand English anymore." If only *Perhaps?*, with its uncertainty-principle name, lived up more to that sentiment of uneasiness, we could all enter the literary Millennium sideways, like Mulder and Scully, with flashlights trained into the dark.

Todd Swift



***The Beginning of Something.*  
The Rhythmic Missionaries  
"Constant Streams and Rivers"  
poems by David "Natty Chief"  
Neudorfer & "Smiling in the  
Face of the Sun" poems by  
Joseph "Kosher Wolf" Neudorfer.  
Zsabir Clearing House 1996.**

I won my copy of *The Beginning of Something* at YAWP because I suggested that "unheimlich" means to choke someone. It's the first chapbook by Rhythmic Missionaries and it contains poems by two of the group's members David "Natty Chief" and Joseph "Kosher Wolf" Neudorfer.

It is an expansive first effort, with sixty-four poems by two writers still in their teens. The chapbook's title is apt. The subject matter rings with their youth and naivete: poems about first love and lust, ska, boring teachers at school. It is the work of newly inspired writers; writers who picked up a book by Steinbeck or Kerouac and thought to themselves, "I can do that."

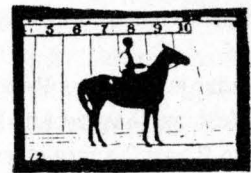
Like many young writers, the voices of the Missionaries are still drowned out by those who went before them. Their poems invoke Whitman, P-Funk, Cummings, Steinbeck, Keats... but tend to come off as pale emulations of the very works they admire. The funk/jazz/jive lingo seems forced: "De trut' is heard 'bout de shitsem/ But de censorshit rules de system" or "And all ya gotta do is listen to that horns-a-boppin melody coupled with/ the Grassroots -- (and oh baby, that is hip)." Unless you happen to be Edwin Torres, it's pretty hard to make lines like "Dig this!" stick.

Nonetheless, there is a lot of potential in this work. You can hear it in poems like "Never Sweet As Milk.." The first stanza reads: "children are weaned/ and then addicted / to rebel-

lion/ because life is/never as sweet as milk." It has an incantatory quality, locating the source of an adolescent's suffering in the contradictory desires for independence and the comfort of innocence. In "Juiced-Up" Kosher Wolf writes: "My French suddenly polished to perfection/ I am now the master of multiple tongues." The humor of the poem is buoyed by the repetition of popping "p"s and humming "m"s.

When I first saw the Rhythmic Missionaries, Jake Brown whispered in my ear, "They're lovely boys." He's right. The Neudorfer brothers write with passion and have a fierce belief in the power of poetry and all art. There's certainly something there: the raw energy of young writers discovering their craft.

Julie Cryslar



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